

Beloved Pastor Commits Suicide, Reveals Church's Fatal Flaw

Perhaps you have seen it by now. A very tragic story that has gone viral. As a fellow pastor, it broke my heart. But part of me possibly understood. Or maybe tried to understand. In a way, I could identify with the news I was reading. I've never met him, but my heart reached out to his family and his devastated church. But usually, when its news like this, no one mentions the bad part. Most often, a eulogy is written, but the cause of death isn't mentioned, as if not discussing it makes it seem to go away.

One of the posts that came across my newsfeed said this:

From Paul Valo—Pastor Andrew Stoecklein of Inland Hills Church (Chino, Ca.) took his own life this weekend. My heart is broken for his wife and three children, as well as for his church family and community. Depression is real and pastors are not exempt or defective who experience this generation, pastors are expected to be business savvy, Instagram quotable preaching celebrities, fully accessible, deeply spiritual, not too young, not too old, and if a pastor doesn't quite measure up to someone's expectation at any given moment, they are given a two out of five star rating on Google. Wow! We have reduced the ministry to star ratings on Google! Let me recommend that you pray for your pastor and support your church faithfully! You'll probably never realize what they walk through privately. Lastly, if you are struggling with depression, regardless of whether you are in the ministry or not, please reach out for help. (Suicide Hotline: 1-800-273-8255).

I don't know the story behind the story of Pastor Stoecklein. I

could try to answer some of the questions I have such as: Was it too much pressure in the ministry? Were there things not dealt with? Could it have been trauma similar to what I experienced such as combat? Working too many hours? Perhaps the symptoms of depression were genetic? However, its not my place to know, but it is my place to reach out with love.

Reading these posts made me realize this: It could be any one of us in ministry. Everyone in ministry is like everyone else. For some reason pastors and church leaders are put on pedestals, elevated above our church members. But why? We are just like every person in the world. We are just like you. And we struggle with mental illness, too.

It's been said that 1 in every 4 pastors struggles with depression. Lifeway Research reveals that the number of pastors diagnosed with clinical depression was double the national average. Forty five percent sought advice from their family doctor regarding stress and anxiety issues. Nearly one-fourth of all pastors (23 percent) acknowledge having "personally struggled with mental illness," and half of those pastors say the illness has been diagnosed.

I know some people will try to over-spiritualize this blaming principalities and powers. Trying to come up with lists of demons possibly responsible, stating pastors have targets on their backs. But the statistics are nearly the same with those not in ministry.

Sure, spiritual warfare is real. But too many churches are so focused on spiritual warfare when they should be loving people more than they are binding and rebuking the devil. And that includes loving your pastors who are just like you. And other Christian churches will be careless and try to bring "discipline and correction" into situations like these. But their attacks and jabs will only push people further away from God, and cause more struggling pastors to hide their struggles.

I think Paul Valo of Christ Church of Orlando, Florida, got it right on his post about present-day pastors. We try to live up to being a rockstar celebrity preacher when we should just be ourselves. And be the person God made us to be. Jesus didn't engage in territorial spiritual warfare. Instead, he wrapped a towel around Himself, washing His disciples' feet. He served. He loved. He sacrificed Himself so His followers would go love others.

Church, let's love well. John 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." {eoa}

Jared Laskey, ., M.A. Christian Ministry, is founder and senior pastor of Destiny Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia. He lives to see Jesus awaken this generation to the power of the Holy Spirit. You can follow him on twitter @jaredalaskey and purchase his co-authored book Veronica's Hero. You can also subscribe to his podcast and check out .